In the absence of Ms. Chatardova (Czechia), Mr. Matjila (South Africa), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Agenda item 9: Special economic, humanitarian and disaster relief assistance (*continued*)
(A/73/78–E/2018/54)

1. **The President** said that the number of children living in conflict zones had been steadily increasing since 2000. They faced grave risks, including a lack of proper nutrition, medical care, safe water and sanitation; an increased risk of violence, exploitation and abuse; disrupted education; and protracted displacement. The objective of the high-level panel discussion about to begin was to reflect on the vulnerabilities and risks that children faced in armed conflict and to explore good practices in protecting children and meeting their specific needs, including through ensuring respect for international humanitarian and human rights law. He hoped that participants would come away with practical steps that could be implemented. The protection of children in armed conflict must be a priority; indeed, his own country, South Africa, firmly believed that, by working together, the international community could make a difference for those children.

2. *A video presentation based on real-life drawings by children affected by armed conflict was shown.*

3. **The President** said that the drawings in the video, which demonstrated how children reflected on their daily experiences in conflict situations, caused viewers to contemplate the dangers to which children were exposed. The international community must reflect deeply on what should be done to save those children and prepare them for the future. He hoped that the African saying "any child is my child" could help guide that reflection.

High-level panel discussion: "Addressing the impact of armed conflict on children — strengthening the response to meet children's needs"

4. **Mr. Lowcock** (Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator), moderator, said that children continued to be disproportionately affected by armed conflict. According to a new report from Save the Children International, the number of children living in conflict zones had increased by more than 75 per cent since the early 1990s, to over 350 million in 2016, representing one in six of the world's children. They were robbed of their childhoods in many ways, including by being forced into armed groups or subjected to sexual exploitation and abuse.

5. While the meeting could be spent listing the scale of atrocities and abuses, it also provided an opportunity to discuss what could be done to tackle those problems, as there were reasons to be hopeful. He therefore asked the panellists to share some of the activities undertaken by their organizations to make a difference for children and asked the first panellist, Ms. Malek, to share her experience as a refugee, including the difficulties she had faced and what had enabled her to overcome them.

6. **Ms. Malek** (South Sudanese refugee and founder of Stand for Education), panellist, said that she had been born into a large, middle-class family in the 1980s during the second civil war in Sudan, in what was now officially known as the Republic of South Sudan. She had felt that she had a good life, as most children did, especially when they had their parents, foundation, home and the basic necessities. When the war had broken out, people had suddenly been told to leave their homes and their families. Young children had been forced to leave everything they had known because they were in danger and their country no longer accepted them.

7. Her family had been displaced. Her father, who had been working in the Government at the time, had wanted to stay. Her mother, on the other hand, had focused on saving her daughters so that they could have a better chance at life and education. As a result, her mother had made the difficult decision to escape with her daughters. From Khartoum, her family had escaped to Egypt. Her mother had sold all her possessions so that they could be smuggled on a ship, where they had spent approximately two weeks hiding in a compartment. Her father had had no idea.

8. In Egypt, despite having been educated as a nurse, her mother had had to start from scratch to ensure that her children could go to school. As a result, at nine years old, she had taken care of her younger sisters while her mother worked, taking them to school every morning, feeding them and making sure that they would be able to survive another day. There had not been refugee camps, but her family had stayed in a refugee area, in which the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the International Rescue Committee had provided support for migrations and transitions. Having applied for asylum, her family had been granted refugee status in the United States of America through the lottery system four and a half years after their arrival in Egypt. While they had restarted their lives in Newark, New Jersey, they had continued to face discrimination. In Egypt, people had told them

to go back to their country. In the United States, people had sometimes not understood them and had not known about the refugee crisis or even the existence of their country. While she had felt that her situation was horrid, her cousins' situation had been worse. They had walked for three or four months to escape Sudan through Kenya. Along the way, they had seen dead bodies, kidnappings, women being raped and women and children being trafficked. Her mother had located those same cousins in the United States, and her family's case had been moved to California, where they had re-established their lives yet again. At that time, she had been discovered as a model.

9. She had learned very quickly that she was privileged and very fortunate to have the opportunities she had been given, even though she had not recognized it at the time. The people who worked behind the scenes, who understood the refugee or migration issue, had given her family a chance. Their work had allowed her to attend the current meeting. As an actor, model and disc jockey, she had had an even bigger platform on which to make a difference. As soon as she had entered the entertainment industry, she had known that she needed to speak on behalf of the voiceless and for all the people she had left behind. She also spoke on behalf of her mother, who had sacrificed her life since age 14 to take care of her family. For that reason, she had decided to use her platform and not allow her platform to use her. She shared her story, of which she had been ashamed because she did not want to be seen as a victim or treated with pity. She was simply a human being, like everyone else. She had lived through a circumstance that was beyond her control, but she had survived, and she was making the best of it. She called on participants to use their voices and platforms to bring awareness to the humanitarian crisis.

10. **Mr. Lowcock** (Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator) asked the second panellist about the specific vulnerabilities that children in armed conflict faced and how those problems were compounded.

11. **Ms. Fore** (Executive Director, United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)), panellist, said that 535 million children were affected by armed conflict, 10 million were refugees and 17 million were internally displaced. Community needs were growing in States such as Iraq, Myanmar, Nigeria, the Sudan, the Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen. Children faced significant human rights vulnerabilities, forced displacement and separation from their families. They also faced threats to their personal safety, including abduction, trafficking, violence, sexual abuse and exploitation and the use of explosive weapons by armed forces and groups. Children became front-line targets; they were used as human shields and killed or maimed by the deliberate targeting of hospitals and schools. The compounded consequences of those vulnerabilities set in motion a downward spiral that disrupted lives and devastated futures. Conflicts destroyed basic services, including health care, water and education. Family incomes suffered, making it more difficult for parents to provide proper nutrition to their children, and collapsing health services increased the spread of preventable diseases. Furthermore, the lack of humanitarian access made it difficult to provide services.

12. In the Kasai region of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, 200 health centres and 400 schools had been attacked, and violence had driven 850,000 children from their homes. As a result, children were vulnerable to violence, abuse and exploitation; they were unable to attend school; and over 350,000 were currently suffering from severe acute malnutrition. In Yemen, 1.8 million children were acutely malnourished, 2 million were out of school and approximately 250,000 under 5 years of age were suffering from suspected cholera and acute watery diarrhoea.

13. A generation of children was at risk. The international community must not allow that humanitarian crisis to continue. UNICEF therefore renewed its call for an end to conflict and for zero tolerance against the targeting of children. All parties to conflict must abide by their obligations under international law and their legal and moral commitments to protect children at all times, which included ending their detention and criminalization. UNICEF also called for zero tolerance of attacks against humanitarian personnel. It was increasingly difficult to access children in countries in which their needs were greatest. In Iraq, Lebanon, Libya, Myanmar, Nigeria, Somalia, South Sudan and the Syrian Arab Republic, UNICEF and its partners were ready to deliver vital humanitarian support. Their abiding interest was in serving children, but they could only do so if all parties to conflict and their allies granted them full and unconditional access.

14. **Mr. Lowcock** (Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator), introducing the third panellist, said that it would be interesting to hear more about the medium- and long-term impacts of conflicts on children from the perspective of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC).

15. **Mr. Mardini** (Director for the Near and Middle East, International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)), panellist, said that over half of all refugees were children and, in 2016 alone, over 8,000 children

had been killed or maimed in conflict situations. While there were legal obligations and frameworks in place to protect civilians, particularly children, there was still a significant gap between the law and its practice and between the pledges made and the realities on the ground. Those working for ICRC witnessed daily the devastation that was caused when laws were not respected. For example, violence against health-care facilities and personnel resulted in children suffering from diseases, psychosocial trauma and long-term injuries and disabilities. The long-term effects of attacks on health care were particularly devastating for children, as those living in countries affected by conflict were twice as likely to die before age 5.

16. Education was among the least resilient public services during conflict. Access to school was often constrained by insecurity, military operations and numerous violations of international humanitarian law. Students and teachers were attacked or threatened. They were frequently casualties of conflicts as a result of urban warfare in densely populated areas and the excessive use of force by armed forces and groups. In addition, schools were targeted, incidentally damaged or used for military purposes, including for weapons and ammunition storage. While schools were civilian objects under international humanitarian law, when used by armed forces and groups, they lost their protection and became military targets. In addition, schools were sometimes used to host internally displaced persons, which also disrupted education. Those issues had severe consequences for children's futures as well as their country's long-term social and economic outlook.

17. Children who were recruited by armed forces or groups were particularly vulnerable. They were often imprisoned, wounded or killed. They were made victims of, witnesses to and sometimes participants in atrocities, including rape and other forms of sexual violence. When families fled, leaving everything behind, children were exposed to family separation. Limited access to food, water and shelter also affected children disproportionately and resulted in malnutrition, serious health problems or death, as was the case in Yemen and parts of the Syrian Arab Republic and had been the case in Iraq. Displaced girls and boys were particularly vulnerable to sexual violence and exploitation, and boys were at risk of being arbitrarily detained, where they were subjected to poor conditions and ill-treatment.

18. Children affected by violence needed psychosocial support to meet their specific needs related to the trauma of displacement or forced recruitment, as experiencing violence could have a direct impact on the development of children's brains and bodies. For example, the children who had lived under the rule of Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant and other groups had witnessed atrocities to which no child should be exposed. It was therefore critical to invest in psychosocial programmes. Since 2010, ICRC had increased the number of its programmes from 5 to 107, benefiting children in several categories, including those wounded by weapons, amputees, survivors of sexual violence and families of the missing.

19. **Mr. Lowcock** (Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator), enquired about ICRC efforts to solve the problem of family separation in the Near and Middle East.

20. **Mr. Mardini** (Director for the Near and Middle East, International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)) said that ICRC was very active in re-establishing family links, working on the ground with national partners, primarily national Red Cross and Red Crescent societies. Although the issue of foreign fighters was controversial within the international community, it was also important to re-establish their family links. For example, foreign fighters had brought 1,800 family members to Iraq, two thirds of whom were minors under age 12. The need to re-establish family links, which had become an ongoing task for ICRC, continued to grow as more people were displaced or separated. For example, in the Syrian Arab Republic, 700,000 internally displaced persons had been able to return to their neighbourhoods in 2017, but over 2 million had been newly displaced.

21. **Mr. Lowcock** (Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator), introducing the fourth panellist asked about the challenge of meeting children's educational needs during conflicts.

22. **Ms. Sherif** (Director, Education Cannot Wait), panellist, said that Education Cannot Wait was a global fund for education created by the World Humanitarian Summit and hosted by UNICEF. It catered to 75 million children and young persons who were impacted by armed conflicts and natural disasters.

23. Five major challenges in conflict situations were particularly relevant to education. First, due to the current duration of armed conflicts, the average humanitarian crisis lasted seven years. In the case of Afghanistan, the conflict had lasted 40 years. Given that the school cycle for children should be 12 years, multiple generations of children lost their right to continuous, quality education in long-term conflicts. Furthermore, displacement lasted on average between 10 and 17 years, which meant that children were displaced in camps or in host communities for all or most of the 12-year school cycle, often without access

to national education systems, or having education disrupted altogether.

24. Second, every armed conflict, without exception, was a protection crisis marked by violations of international humanitarian and human rights law, including refugee law and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Impunity had intensified and prevailed, despite the many efforts in recent decades to establish an international law enforcement system, whether through international tribunals, dialogue and engagement within the United Nations or training and awareness-raising.

25. Third, too many children were being left behind. Only 39 per cent of refugee children attended primary school. Girls were among the furthest left behind, and girls in armed conflict were 90 per cent less likely to receive a quality education. Children with physical or mental disabilities were also left behind.

26. Fourth, an extremely low percentage of international development and humanitarian funding was allocated to education. Those 12 years of education represented an investment in the human mind and the future of a generation. It was also an investment in the empowerment of girls to provide alternatives to early marriage. Currently, a girl in South Sudan was more likely to die in childbirth than to finish primary school. Despite the dramatic statistics, only 3 to 4 per cent of humanitarian funding was allocated to education in emergencies. She wondered whether that was a reflection on how little value was placed on investment in the human mind, gender equality and the empowerment of a new generation, as education was fundamental to achieving peaceful conflict resolution, building economically viable States, exercising good governance and supporting democracy and the rule of law.

27. Fifth, there was a significant divide between humanitarian and development actors. While development actors understood the value of education, they were more cautious during crises and unwilling to take risks or operate with the speed required. For example, hundreds of thousands of children and young persons fleeing across the border from Myanmar to Bangladesh were in urgent need of education. Without it, they would have significant psychological scars and be overly traumatized, further disempowered and left behind. Education was one of the first interventions needed to manage and rescue human values and the human mind. On the humanitarian side, education was not usually considered life-saving. Low levels of funding in the humanitarian sector made it impossible to provide quality education, and yet it was critical to bridge the divide between development and humanitarian efforts, in line with the commitment made at the World Humanitarian Summit and the Secretary-General's recommendation in his report on the repositioning of the United Nations development system to deliver on the 2030 Agenda.

28. Education must be seen as an investment in the human being, for girls and boys alike, with particular emphasis on girls, refugees and displaced persons. It must be linked to all other Sustainable Development Goals, as good governance, the rule of law, peace and security and conflict prevention would not be possible unless the members of a society had been empowered from an early age to lead those efforts.

29. **Mr. Lowcock** (Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator) asked about the work undertaken by Stand for Education.

30. **Ms. Malek** (South Sudanese refugee and founder of Stand for Education) said that she wanted to use the limelight to share the stories of the voiceless and the helpless. In her advocacy work, she had usually been the only refugee sharing experiences. In order to help people, it was important to listen to them to identify their needs. As a result, she had started an organization to address the issues affecting refugees, as told through their voices, stories and experiences.

31. She had chosen Stand for Education because education meant life, enlightenment and opportunity. It played an important role in all other sectors, including health, the economy and agriculture, and it was a basic human right. Every child wanted to learn to count and read and colour. And yet, where she was from, children were getting married before they even knew the alphabet. They were trafficked, used for labour and recruited as soldiers. She advocated for education as a way to end poverty, discrimination, ignorance and greed. After learning of several schools in South Sudan that had been abandoned because of conflict and unnecessary wars, she had begun to partner with schools that needed help to remain in the country, rebuild and provide knowledge and education.

32. Stand for Education also helped with understanding the basic right of land ownership, because most people had ancestral land rights, which were difficult to convey in written contracts. She wanted to help address those issues in a way that respected cultures and promoted sustainability and self-sufficiency. Her organization also had a peacebuilding programme that focused on conflict resolution and providing the right type of education, tailored to the needs of the community. It worked with the Ministry of Education in South Sudan to renovate

existing schools and provide quality education. Its "Stand Up Girl" programme worked to prevent child marriage and early motherhood by providing girls with education and life skills.

33. The organization worked at the grass-roots level with anyone who was underprivileged and needed basic access to education. The Malek Primary School, which had begun with 200 children, had been funded by an organization called ImpactAVillage. The community members themselves had built the school; they had only needed the resources and the opportunity to do so. The Hope and Resurrection Secondary School had 300 students, 100 of whom were girls who lived in the compound, thanks to generous partners and funders who had built a dormitory. The boys, however, had to walk one or two hours every day to arrive at the school. When parents had wanted to withdraw their daughters to be married, the school had instituted a policy under which all children from the same family would have to be removed. As a result, families had elected to keep all of their children in the school. Women's empowerment was not just about women; men and boys must be involved and educated so that they felt included in the progress rather than resentful of it. It was not a competition; men and women had different power, and each power was supposed to balance the other.

34. In partnership with Confident Children out of Conflict, her organization worked to address the needs of orphans, child soldiers and children who had been sexually or physically abused or had suffered severe injuries from war. Through storytelling and human connections, it listened to children, youth and communities in an effort to understand those needs. When used ethically and responsibly, social media provided an opportunity to hold certain people accountable. She encouraged participants to become the change they wished to see in the world, turning problematic situations into opportunities to find solutions.

35. In celebration of World Refugee Day, she had worked with other models who were refugees, migrants or immigrants to put together a campaign that focused on being human rather than being labelled. Humanity was about making connections. There must be an end to stereotypes, racism and the stigmatization of refugees and migrants.

36. **Mr. Lowcock** (Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator) asked about the most effective and durable ways of addressing children's needs in conflict.

37. **Ms. Fore** (Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)) said that education was one of the most effective and durable ways to address children's needs. Rapid response mechanisms also played an important role. For example, a number of United Nations agencies and non-profit organizations (NGOs) would arrive in difficult locations and secure an area in which they would provide nutrition and health services for a few days. Rapid response mechanisms were also effective on a larger scale. In Iraq, 1.3 million children on the move had received supplies, including water, hygiene products and ready-to-eat rations. In South Sudan, 780,000 children under 5 years of age had been provided with health, nutrition, water, sanitation, hygiene, education and protection services.

38. In addition, programming and services in fragile contexts needed to look beyond the immediate emergency to longer-term development, with initiatives to improve disease outbreak surveillance and strengthen community schools, health centres, hospitals and water systems. In the Syrian Arab Republic, in 2017, UNICEF had supported the rehabilitation of water, sanitation and hygiene facilities in 558 schools, benefiting over 380,000 students. The community had been vital to that undertaking. In Yemen, 1.3 million beneficiaries had received emergency cash assistance, which had been provided in partnership with the World Bank. Such assistance helped families meet their immediate needs, boosted the local economy and put young people on a longer-term path of recovery.

39. The international community must commit to engaging with all parties to conflict in a non-political way, which was vital to negotiating humanitarian access, building trust on all sides and securing the release of children who had been recruited to armed forces or groups. It must also continue to build new partnerships with the World Bank, as well as local governments, NGOs, civil society and businesses in order to reach children living through conflict. For example, in South Sudan, a number of young people in the camps had been learning how to operate and maintain the hand water pumps. Wristbands with tracking technology could help reunite children who were separated from their families. Such partnerships would increase the effectiveness of all organizations; efforts to promote development and humanitarian assistance also promoted peace.

40. **Mr. Lowcock** (Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator) said that it would be helpful to hear examples of good practices or success stories in making the protection of children in conflicts a reality.

41. **Mr. Mardini** (Director for the Near and Middle East, International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)) said that the work of ICRC was grounded in four important principles in order to protect children before violations occurred. First, children who had been recruited by armed groups and were accused of having committed crimes should be treated primarily as victims of violations, not perpetrators. Second, they should be detained only as a measure of last resort. Third, children displaced by conflict must be treated with special respect and protection, including ensuring access to food, health care and education, and should be reunited with their families. Lastly, ICRC urged more States to prevent the recruitment of children and ease their reintegration into society by adhering to the Paris Commitments to protect children from unlawful recruitment or use by armed forces or armed groups, which complemented existing laws.

42. Given the fragmented and protracted nature of conflicts in the Middle East, there were a number of different actors. For example, hundreds of armed groups operated in Syria and Yemen, and dozens of States had been involved in the armed conflicts in Syria and Iraq. That had led to a pattern of diffusion, and sometimes denial, of responsibility for complying with obligations under international humanitarian law. ICRC had therefore engaged in a dialogue with States and armed groups in an effort to sensitize armed groups to the importance of not recruiting minors, albeit with mixed results and, building on good practices that had worked in previous conflicts, convince States that the support provided to their partners and groups should be conditional upon respect for international humanitarian law. States should also establish a vetting system to ensure that they did not recruit individuals with a record of violations. If States and groups were serious about respecting international humanitarian law, there was a range of practical measures that would reduce the problem. Such dialogue should not be politicized; it should be undertaken in a confidential, bilateral manner.

43. Furthermore, conversations with communities and minors helped to find solutions that were anchored in the reality on the ground, and ICRC often relied on local solutions to alleviate suffering. For instance, in Lebanon, it had reinforced passive security in schools and had trained students and teachers to be prepared when fighting broke out. The first time that ICRC had been able to enter a besieged area in Syria, it had been focused on providing food, water and medicine; however, the communities' highest priority had been restoring education. As a result, ICRC had included school kits in its distributions in Syria, complete with a mine risk leaflet providing guidance on yet another acute humanitarian problem.

44. **Mr. Lowcock** (Under-Secretary General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator) asked what good examples had been seen on the ground to preserve and restore children's education in conflict. It would also be helpful to elaborate on the humanitarian-development nexus in education and how to generate solutions by working together across silos.

45. **Ms. Sherif** (Director of Education Cannot Wait) said that, as a global fund, Education Cannot Wait had five core objectives: to inspire political commitment through positive and forward-looking initiatives; to catalyse funding; to encourage collaboration and bridge the humanitarian and development divide in the education sector; to ensure the localization of services by listening to the people receiving assistance; and to improve effectiveness, results and accountability. Education Cannot Wait did not operate in-country; rather, it served as a facilitator to bring together actors around education in crisis, working in partnership with United Nations agencies, NGOs, civil society, host Governments and refugees and displaced persons themselves.

46. At the global level, education was making its way to the forefront. At the Group of Seven Summit in June 2018, leaders had pledged $2.9 billion for girls' education. The European Union Commissioner for Humanitarian Aid and Crisis Management had also pledged to increase humanitarian spending on education to 10 per cent of humanitarian aid allocations. Since the establishment of Education Cannot Wait, there had been an upward trend of 0.2 per cent in allocations for education.

47. With regard to good practices, it was essential not to create new coordination mechanisms in armed conflicts. While bilateral agreements and multilateral coordination could be undertaken in a typical development context, the international community must work through humanitarian coordination structures in armed conflicts. Education Cannot Wait worked with humanitarian coordinators and the Inter-Agency Standing Committee cluster system to strengthen the education cluster. Rather than stepping out of that system to work with development actors, her organization and its partners invited development actors to be part of the humanitarian coordination system around education. On the ground, they ensured that development actors were invited to coordination meetings about planned investments in the education sector. As a result of that new model, development and humanitarian actors were coming together to plan for education in the midst of crisis. For example, her organization and its partners had travelled to Uganda in

2017 to assist the 1.3 million South Sudanese refugees, half of whom had been school-aged children and young persons. Development actors had already been working with the Government of Uganda to invest in Ugandan children. Education Cannot Wait, which had been asked to develop a joint programme, had brought together the humanitarian and development communities under the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. As a result of that collective effort, the first-ever joint humanitarian-development programme would be launched in July 2018 to address the Ugandan refugee crisis. The roles were clearly defined: humanitarian actors would deliver immediate services and, in parallel, development actors would begin to establish the national education plan, curriculum and language programmes. Similar joint programmes were being launched in Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Somalia under the humanitarian coordination system. The humanitarian-development nexus was about partnerships, pairing humanitarian speed with development depth.

48. It was also important to hear from the refugees themselves. For example, during the consultations in Uganda, the various organizations had been focusing on continuity and quality of education. However, the refugees had pointed out that if school fees had not been included in the joint programme, they would have been unable to benefit from that education, as they could not afford it. The ability to access services was essential. In Afghanistan, her organization had worked with its partners to ensure that 75 per cent of recruited teachers were women, with a view to opening access for girls and making parents more comfortable with sending their girls to school.

49. In 2017, the United Nations agencies and NGOs working on the ground in Bangladesh, led by the inter-agency coordination group that was headed by UNICEF and Save the Children, had contacted Education Cannot Wait to request funding to immediately implement their consolidated, coordinated proposal for education. Education Cannot Wait had been able to move quickly because it was a fund designed to operate with less bureaucracy and more accountability. In their commitment to the Rohingya children, the agencies had worked together, rather than in competition, to organize a coordinated response in which it was very clear what actions needed to be taken. In February 2018, just six months later, learning centres had been established and psychosocial services had been provided. As a result, hope had been restored to the children. Those results were possible when everyone worked together.

50. **Mr. Lowcock** (Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator) asked how to effectively involve members of the public who were unfamiliar with the impact of armed conflicts on children around the world.

51. **Ms. Bassols Delgado** (Spain) said that the impact of armed conflicts on children was an area in which a number of issues converged, including peace and security, human rights and humanitarian and development action. Greater effort must be made to integrate those elements. She asked how to resolve the dichotomy between investing in much-needed public infrastructure systems, such as education, water, sanitation and health, and having to do so through the authorities that controlled those public infrastructures and impeded humanitarian access. She also wondered how the humanitarian response could address the varying levels of fragility in middle-income countries immersed in conflict.

52. **Mr. Moura** (Observer for Portugal) said that, several years earlier, his Government had established a programme to provide emergency scholarships to Syrian students in tertiary education. That rapid response mechanism was currently being expanded to include students from other countries in conflict so that they could continue their studies and contribute to the recovery of their countries in the future.

53. **Mr. Seleka** (South Africa) said that schools were essential facilities to develop the minds of children. It was disturbing that they could become military targets when occupied by rebels, as children who were still on those premises could be used as human shields. According to the law of war, certain facilities must not be targeted. He therefore asked how to ensure the security of occupied schools and strengthen both the law and respect for the law to prevent those crimes.

54. **Mr. Cottier** (Observer for Switzerland) said that respect for international humanitarian and human rights law was paramount. Switzerland therefore called on all parties to conflict to fulfil their obligations and allow humanitarian organizations to access populations in need. Education was also crucial. The 75 million children living in countries affected by conflict had the right to an education; it was not simply a matter of political will. The international community must act effectively and swiftly so that those children would not become a lost generation. Integrated protection and education programmes provided a solution, as those areas were mutually reinforcing. He was interested in hearing the views of the panellists in that regard. The international community must also strengthen collaboration between humanitarian and development actors and ensure flexible coordination in fragile contexts. A holistic approach would allow for better

protection, prospects and quality of life for children living in emergency and crisis situations.

55. **Ms. Vives Balmaña** (Andorra) said that children suffered the repercussions of armed conflict without having the ability to resolve them. Her delegation was fully committed to addressing the problems faced by children in armed conflict and wished to know more about the progress made by the panellists' organizations in that regard. She also asked how Member States could improve advocacy, in addition to providing funds. An emphasis on values could bring about real change in extreme situations and ensure respect for international law, as attacks on infrastructure, especially schools, gave cause for concern. Her Government also believed that education was paramount.

56. **Mr. Islam** (Observer for Bangladesh) said that his country was currently hosting 700,000 Rohingyas, 58 per cent of whom were children. In that context, he asked how to address the cross-border dimension of children in armed conflicts or humanitarian crises.

57. **Mr. Mardini** (Director for the Near and Middle East, International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)) said that, under international humanitarian law, schools were protected civilian objects. However, in time of war, when the facilities were used by a party to the conflict as a military base and there was no evidence that children or teachers were in the school, the other party could make the case that the facility had lost its civilian use and had become a military target. In that instance, the school would lose its protected status because it had been deliberately used for military purposes, which was considered a violation of international humanitarian law. The ICRC staff on the ground would raise its concern directly with that party and always encourage them not to occupy schools, water infrastructure, hospitals or health centres. Children and civilians were always protected under international humanitarian law.

58. Regarding the cross-border dimension of children in armed conflict, civilians fleeing conflict situations in search of safety had the right to seek refuge in neighbouring countries or in other villages within the same country. Under the principle of non-refoulement, civilians should not be pushed to return to their country of origin if they would be exposed to risks to their security or physical integrity. Humanitarian organizations, such as ICRC, supported refugee populations while factoring in the need to support host communities as well. Communities in Jordan and Lebanon had hosted large numbers of Syrian refugees; humanitarian programmes should not be designed exclusively for refugees when host communities were also in dire need of support.

59. **Ms. Fore** (Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)) said that the representative of Spain had drawn attention to a very interesting dichotomy. Nevertheless, the utmost priority was attached to helping children and young persons. UNICEF provided assistance to both the school system itself and any children who were not allowed into the school system, while continuing to work with all parties to allow those children to participate.

60. With regard to middle-income countries, UNICEF had recently released a report on fragile States. Given that every country had areas that were more or less developed, fragility existed in every State. Sustainable public-private partnerships would be essential to addressing that issue in the future.

61. With regard to the targeting of schools, members of UNICEF shared the concerns of the representative of South Africa and had been urgently discussing the importance of protecting both schools and hospitals. It was also important to protect children on their way to and from school, which continued to be an issue in a number of countries.

62. In response to the representative of Switzerland, she said that one of the issues with regard to education was a lack of early funding. Rapid-response finance mechanisms had a significant impact in humanitarian crises. The funding mobilized by Education Cannot Wait had allowed UNICEF to act quickly in Bangladesh. Early funding had also played a role in combating Ebola in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

63. With regard to advocacy, videos were an excellent way to engage the public, both online and on public television stations. UNICEF, Education Cannot Wait and other entities had produced several videos that could be shared with Member States. There were also a number of initiatives that Member States could join to improve advocacy, including the Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack and the Safe Schools Declaration.

64. Responding to the representative of Bangladesh, she said that host communities should be supported. In addition, the language barrier was one of the first areas that needed to be addressed in cross-border issues. When dialects were compatible, children had a chance to continue their education. If that was not the case, they needed to learn the local language and be admitted into local school systems. Furthermore, many school systems did not allow refugee children to enrol unless they had a birth certificate, which many did not. It would therefore be helpful to provide them with identity documents. The 16,000 Rohingya children who had

been born in Bangladesh since August 2017 would face difficulties without identity documents or citizenship.

65. **Ms. Sherif** (Director of Education Cannot Wait) said that some Council members were receiving refugees, and their Governments were providing a great deal of support. As for compliance with international law, it was important to remember that the Government of Bangladesh was receiving the refugees, not committing the crimes. It had been extremely generous to the Rohingyas and had supported Education Cannot Wait in creating a framework for the education of refugees, which was a significant step forward.

66. The international community must support initiatives like the Portuguese programme for tertiary education. The Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack was a good example of what could be done to strengthen protections for civilians in armed conflict in order to reinforce international law. It was important to support law enforcement mechanisms, including international tribunals, and ensure that the Security Council was guided and inspired by the international community so that accountability was maintained.

67. **Ms. Malek** (South Sudanese refugee and founder of Stand for Education) said that the international community must work together. Many organizations shared core values and were working towards the same goals to determine how to provide education. There should be a focus on girls' education, including menstrual hygiene management. Furthermore, teaching children in their own language would provide better, quality education.

68. **Mr. Lowcock** (Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator) asked the President to share his experience as a refugee and why the issue of children in armed conflict was important to him.

69. **The President** said that he had requested the inclusion of a panel on children in armed conflict during the current humanitarian affairs segment. Refugees sometimes walked day and night, uncertain of their future or their destination, knowing only that they would be safe from persecution, imprisonment or death. They would arrive in a foreign country to seek refuge, surrender themselves and ask for protection. Many had no identity and only a change of clothes. In his case, he had fled apartheid South Africa in 1976 because thousands of children had been killed. He had been alone and unable to contact his parents to inform them of his whereabouts. Eventually, he had returned to South Africa, and Nelson Mandela had been released. He urged participants not to forget about refugees because they could become the leaders of tomorrow.

70. He had not attended school; he had been a guerrilla fighter, living in the forest. During that time, he had been taught that schools, hospitals and water facilities were off limits; attacks on white children and civilians violated the law; and the symbol of the red cross was to be respected. And yet, the police had attacked and killed schoolchildren, including inside schools. He was surprised that current fighters were not taught to respect those facilities. He hoped that ICRC would intensify its contact with host countries, as some Governments had contact with fighters. The international community should require those Governments to take responsibility when international humanitarian law was not respected.

71. Furthermore, he urged host countries to provide some form of identity to refugees, especially to school-aged children. A number of countries had issued him a passport when he had not had documents. Providing refugees with an identity gave them a sense of responsibility and belonging, thereby restoring some of their dignity. It also gave them something to protect. The international community should appeal to Governments to assist children crossing the border in that regard.

72. Organizations such as UNICEF, ICRC and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees should provide a means of communication to refugees in host countries. After 10 years in exile, he had finally been able to speak with his parents in South Africa thanks to a Scandinavian humanitarian initiative. Even children who were 2 or 3 years of age would always remember their mother's name. Children could also use mobile applications to communicate face-to-face.

73. Within the United Nations, a resolution should be drafted to reinforce the sanctity of schools and hospitals. If Governments were not able to negotiate with hostage-takers without invading a complex, then they must find another method to target rebels hiding in schools and hospitals to ensure that children were safe and that those buildings were not attacked. The international community had a collective responsibility to strengthen international humanitarian and human rights law to enhance protection for the increasing number of children caught up in conflicts.

74. **Mr. Lowcock** (Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator) said that children in conflict were usually dependent on older persons, often persons with disabilities. He wondered how the international community could give greater consideration to the caregivers of children and asked what needed to be done to restore the sanctity of places like schools and hospitals.

75. **Mr. Mardini** (Director for the Near and Middle East, International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC))

said that more armed groups had emerged over the previous seven years than in the previous seven decades. He hoped that it would be possible to restore the practice of not targeting schools and hospitals in conflicts. However, violations of international humanitarian law were often not punished by sanctions. As a result, armed groups and States had no incentive to improve their behaviour. Perhaps the public could play a role in bringing about change. Support provided by States to any party to the conflict should be conditional upon a zero-tolerance policy for attacks on hospitals, health-care providers, schools and teachers. Unfortunately, despite Security Council resolution 2286 (2016) on the protection of health-care services and infrastructure in armed conflict, attacks against health-care facilities had increased. The gap between rhetoric, intentions and principles and the reality on the ground could be bridged only if those who provided weapons and sponsored parties to the conflict were more serious about respect for the basic rules of war.

76. **Ms. Fore** (Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)) said that the story shared by the President illustrated the fact that protecting schools, hospitals or water systems could be a local commitment and would take place on the ground informally if child soldiers and militants had grown up knowing that they needed to protect their communities' facilities and people. Nevertheless, the international community should place greater emphasis on protection. UNICEF was committed to finding ways to bring that issue to the attention of the public, as the targeting of aid workers had reached a level that must not be accepted. And yet, the problem continued to grow.

77. When trauma occurred, it was very important to provide immediate psychosocial support to children and parents. UNICEF had a number of community aid programmes for young parents, both mothers and fathers. In 2018, the Fund would be focusing on primary and community health care, in partnership with the World Health Organization and other organizations. An agenda for young people would be launched in September 2018, with United Nations agencies, public and private partners and Member States.

78. **Ms. Sherif** (Director of Education Cannot Wait) said that, as a human rights lawyer, she was inspired when the conversation turned to international human rights law and the need for protection. She also wondered why the various enforcement mechanisms were not working. While laws must be enforced and respected, ultimately, humanity needed to be restored. The best way to do so was through the value systems imparted to children and young persons in their formative years through education. The ability to think critically, feel compassion and empathy, respect a system of coexistence and resolve conflicts peacefully were all a part of the value system. For that reason, education was life-saving and should be a priority before, during and after conflict.

79. **Ms. Malek** (South Sudanese refugee and founder of Stand for Education) said that, while children were very vulnerable and fragile, they were also the most aware. It was important to listen to the needs of children and young persons because they would be the leaders of the future. The international community must invest in children's education, which should be free and must be provided during crisis. Humanitarians needed to be able to respond immediately to avert the loss of life. Lastly, collaboration was vital to achieving results; in the words of her favourite African proverb: "If you want to go fast, go alone; if you want to go far, we go together."

80. **Mr. Islam** (Observer for Bangladesh) said that, while the discussion had been more focused on reactive approaches to the issue of children in armed conflict, it was also important to address the root causes of conflicts. There must also be discussion on the process of returning refugees to their country of origin, where the future to which they aspired could best be secured.

81. **Mr. Lowcock** (Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator) said that prevention was the single greatest overriding theme across the United Nations, and his office would carefully consider the suggestions and points that had been made during the meeting.

82. **The President** said that the panel discussion's message to children was that they had not been forgotten. Member States needed to reflect on what had been done in the past and what now needed to be enhanced to better address those issues. He encouraged them to share their reflections to ensure that the circumstances of children improved. His own country, South Africa, was committed to taking action in that regard.

83. Children in armed conflict would be the leaders of the future. It was therefore important to nurture them as they grew and to ensure that they were not condemned to a futureless world, pushed to radicalization, extremism and armed conflict. The international community must lift them up and give them hope so that they could contribute to a peaceful world in which all children could live in safety.

The meeting rose at 12.50 p.m.